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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the concept for Christian education to be permeated with great moral and ethical teaching. Character education can be the tool for that necessary teaching if consistent with Biblical teaching. There is great demand for the teaching of morality in all schools today, yet is the intention in Christian schools really to teach character? This paper reviews the background and history of both character education and Christian education. It will present practice of the Christian school community in the Seattle area and give implications of a plan for a Bible-based, developmental, character education program for Christian schools from preschool through high school. Appended are "10 Reasons Schools Should Offer Character Education"; "Heritage Christian School Character Development Traits"; and "Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education." (Contains 24 references.) (Author/BT)

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Running head: CHARACTER EDUCATION AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

# Character Education and Christian Education
## Is it Really Happening?

Debby Lierman
Heritage Christian School
1999

SO 032 269

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Paper presented at the Conference on the Social and Moral Fabric of School Life, Edmonds, WA. October 14-16, 1999.

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the concern for Christian education to be permeated in great moral and ethical teaching. Character education can be the tool for that necessary teaching if consistent with Biblical teaching. There is great demand for the teaching of morality in all schools today yet are we really intentional about teaching character in Christian schools?

This paper will review the background and history of both character education and Christian education. It will present practice of the Christian school community in the Seattle area and give implications toward a plan for a Bible-based, developmental, character education program for Christian schools from pre-school through high school.

## Introduction

"Character without knowledge is weak and feeble, but knowledge without character is dangerous and a potential menace to society. Today's America won't achieve the goodness celebrated by de Tocqueville if we graduate young people from our schools who are brilliant but dishonest, who have great intellectual knowledge but don't really care about others, who are great thinkers but are irresponsible."

Sanford N. McDonnell

There is no doubt, a crisis in our culture. Some would tend to look at our young people as people of weak character yet don't those same young people only reflect back what they have been taught or have absorbed. Can we really think that the problems with our youth don't show us problems with ourselves? Character education is not a new thought or a trend. Lately, it has been identified as a potential solution to present societies problem. Our nation was founded on Judeo-Christian values and yet, in the span of 300 years there has been a tremendous decline in morality.

In the 1700's moral education came with strong Christian overtones and was part of the public school system. This continued until the early 1900's when John Dewey challenged the use of moral tales to teach character and endorsed the principle of learning by doing rather than memorizing. In the 1960's, personal choice prevailed and moral instruction was again reduced in public education. The 1970's initiated two things, values clarification and a dramatic rise in the development of Christian schools. Values clarification did not even last through the 1980's, but now there is an effort to promote character education back into the American school system.

My interest is in how Christian schools teach the development of character. One would guess that this approach would permeate the Christian school curriculum and the religious cultural environment. My concern is that Christian schools, like many churches, are instead reflecting the general culture of the day. Character education tends to be haphazard or hidden within the general curriculum.

Stephen Carter (1999) observes that it is the rules of behavior which distinguish civilized humans, who are willing to discipline their desires, from barbarians, who do not even try. He points out that our social life, which was underpinned by family, religion and the common school, is disintegrating and we lack the tools to consider what we should value.

Christian educators have been busy making sure the intellect is fully developed, placing emphasis on the academic program. As a result, there has been general neglect of the spiritual side of students. We assume they pick it up during their years in Christian schools. Westerhoff (1980) states that we have ignored the intuitive, and it is in that mode of consciousness where we develop a moral-value education that will take seriously our world view, our value system and ethical norms.

God's desire is to see Christ's character formed in each student. Paul labored for completeness in Christ (Col. 1:8) –completeness demonstrated through character or spiritual formation. Educators are challenged, in public and private schools to give a "world class" education. There is an ongoing demand for excellence. Even so, Christian schools must exist to meet the standards of a Christian philosophy of education.

Do Christian schools need to reform in a manner that returns them to the biblical roots? Most have exceedingly strong philosophy and mission statements. Christian

schools can be excellent in both academic and character development. Our graduates can be "meek, humble, gentle, patient, peacemakers, seekers of justice, righteous, examples of integrity, compassionate, forgiving, faithful in marriage, loving, servants of others and fishers of men." (Uecker, 1998). In addition they need to be more "clearly and articulately Christian." (Blamires, 1963).

## Christian Education and Character Education, are they compatible?
## A review of definitions, origin and focus

"The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically…Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education."
Martin Luther King Jr.

### Christian Education

Three hundred years ago Christian education and character education could be synonymous. Moral growth was viewed as the driving force in the initial establishment of American schools. The colonists believed that personal encounter with Scripture ensured individual salvation and ethical citizenship.

Christian education bases its whole philosophy on the Bible. Truth is the ultimate object of the educational quest. There is no higher truth than biblical truth. The distinguishing mark of a Christian philosophy of education is the centrality of Jesus Christ. Mark Fakkema (1947), an early pioneer of the modern Christian school movement, wrote:

> Truth is not necessarily truth because it is regarded as such by contemporary scholarship. All teaching that is expressive of God's Word is true. Teaching that is not expository of the Word is falsehood. Philosophical thought must not only look to Scripture for support but it must be scriptural in its whole outlook.

Over fifty years ago Frank Gaebelein (1948) wrote about the Christian and independent school movement in America. He said that yesterday's private education was the forerunner of public education; today private education is a partner in training American youth. Most Christian schools can be characterized by being independent schools. It is independent in the sense of freedom from state support and state control but not free from responsibility. Christian schools enjoy the liberty to work out their mission and philosophy from a biblical perspective but it is not exempt from a social obligation to America. In light of present interpretations of separation of church and State, it is the independent schools which are custodians of spiritual values.

The Council for American Private Education (CAPE), tells us that there are presently 5,927,000 private school students or 11% of the K-12 population. There are 27,000 private schools, making up 25% of all U.S. schools. Projected enrollment is on the rise through the year 2006 with secondary school enrollment peaking in 2008. Of those private schools, 85% are religiously oriented and have fewer than 300 students per school. Average tuition is $3,116 and the myth that private schools serve the predominantly wealthy is discounted by the report released by the Bureau of the Census, where less than 25% of all private school students come from families with annual incomes of $75,000 or more.

The appeal of the Christian school is its independence from government control and the emphasis on the Bible. The Biblical belief is that children are given to parents by God and that parents are accountable to God for the education of their children. The parents are responsible to lead their children to Christ and then to encourage them to

grow in their knowledge of Him. This impacts the academic curriculum, activities of the school and all relationships, policies, and procedures that are a part of the school itself.

Howard Spalding (1947) states,

> We who teach must view the evidence of lack of character with special concern. These adults who wreck their home, seek wealth by dishonest means, and violate all the laws of God and man are our former pupils. In part we made them what they are. We believe in the power of education, yet clearly that power has not been great enough to build a morally sound nation.

After fifty years, we still are seeking that desire to build morally sound schools. The only problem is today we need schools, churches and families to partner toward the common goal without expecting the school to be the entire answer.

## Character Education

Why is there such renewed interest in character education? Lickona (1993) sees three main causes. The first is the decline of the family, traditionally the child's primary moral teacher. Second is the troubling trend in youth character. They have been adversely been affected by poor parenting, the wrong kind of adult role model, the sex, violence, and materialism portrayed in the mass media, and the pressure of the peer group. Thirdly there needs to be a recovery of shared, objectively important ethical values. Values such as respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness, caring and civic virtues are not merely subjective preferences but they have objective worth. (Appendix 1)

Moral education is not a new idea. Wise societies since the time of Plato have made moral education a deliberate aim of schooling. They have educated for character as well as intellect, decency as well as literacy, virtue as well as knowledge. They have

tried to form citizens who will use their intelligence to benefit others as well as themselves, who will try to build a better work.

C. S. Lewis (1947) provides us with a multicultural model of what a good person looks like. He researched the writings of the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Hebrews, Chinese Norse, Indians, and Greeks as well as Anglo Saxon and American writings. Common values included kindness; honesty; loyalty to parents, spouses and family members; an obligation to help the poor, the sick, and the less fortunate: and the right to private property. Lewis called this universal path to becoming a good person by the Chinese name, "the Tao."

Translated into curriculum, Ryan (1993) sees the Tao as a tool to educate children to be concerned about the weak and those in need; to help others: to work hard and complete their tasks well and promptly, even when they do not want to; to control their tempers; to work cooperatively with others and practice good manners; to respect authority and other people's rights; to help resolve conflicts; to understand honesty, responsibility, and friendship; to balance pleasures with responsibilities; and to ask themselves and decide "what is the right thing to do?"

What must character education do to develop good character in the young? It must be broadly conceived to encompass the cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects of morality. Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good and doing the good. (Lickona, 1993). So what has changed to bring us to this point. The 1960's saw a worldwide surge of "personalism." Personalism celebrated the worth, dignity, and autonomy of the individual. It emphasized rights more than responsibility, freedom more

than commitment. It led people to focus on expressing themselves as individuals rather than members of groups such as family, church, community or country.

Even so, the family is still the primary moral educator of the child. How well parents teach their children to respect authority will also lay the foundation for future moral growth. The parents who are most effective are "authoritative" requiring obedience from their children but providing clear reasons for the expectations so that children eventually internalize the moral rationale and act responsibly on their own.

There are two general approaches to moral education, habit or reasoning. (White, 1997). According to Aristotle, moral virtue is the disposition to act in a moral manner as second nature. Adults help children learn what moral virtues are, to develop a commitment to those virtues, and to act virtuously out of habit. A more indirect approach to moral reasoning will lead students to embrace the important virtues that traditionalists would impose directly. The cognitive development works of Piaget and Kohlberg form the psychological basis for this position.

Kohlberg's theory of moral development and moral education grows out of, and depends on, his empirical delineation of the stages of moral judgement. (Table 1) Moral education, in the elementary and secondary years should engage students in discussion and activities that require reflection on moral issues.

What makes character education programs work? Brooks & Kann (1993) have identified key elements for an effective program. These are; direct instruction; language-based curriculum; positive language; content and process; visual reinforcement; school climate approach; teacher-friendly materials; teacher flexibility and creativity, student participation, parental involvement and evaluation.

Table 1
The Six Stages of Moral Judgement

| **Level and Stage** | *What is Right* | *Reasons for doing right.* | *Social perspective of Stage* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Level I: Preconventional**<br>Stage 1: Heteronomous morality. | Sticking to rules backed by punishment; obedience for its own sake. | Avoidance of punishment, superior power of authorities. | Doesn't consider the interests of others or recognize that they differ from others. Confusion of authority's perspective with one's own. |
| Stage 2: Individualism | Follows rules only when in one's immediate interest. Right is what is fair. | To serve one's own needs or interests in a world where one has to recognize that other people also have interests. | Aware that everybody has interests to pursue and that these can conflict. Right is relative. |
| **Level II: Conventional**<br>Stage 3: Mutual interpersonal expectations, relationships and interpersonal conformity. | Living up to what is expected by people close to you or what people generally expect. | The need to be a good person in your own eyes and those of others; caring for others; desire to maintain rules and authority that support good behavior. | Aware of shared feelings, agreements, and expectations which take primacy over individual interests. Relates points of view through the concrete Golden Rule. |
| Stage 4: Social system and conscience. | Fulfilling duties to which you have agreed; laws to be upheld except in extreme cases where they conflict with other fixed social duties. | To keep the institution going as a whole and avoid a breakdown in the system "if everyone did it" imperative of conscience to meet one's defined obligations. | Takes the point of view of the system that defines roles and rules; considers individual relations in terms of place in the system. |
| **Level III: Post-conventional or Principled**<br>Stage 5: Social contract utility and individual rights. | Being aware that people hold a variety of values and opinions and that most of their values and rules are relative to their group. Some non-relative values and rights must be upheld in any society and regardless of majority opinion. | A sense of obligation to law because of one's social contract to make and abide by laws for the welfare of all and for the protection of all peoples rights. Concern that laws and duties be based on rational calculation of overall utility. "the greatest good for the greatest number." | Rational individual aware of values and rights prior to social attachments and contracts. Integrates perspectives by formal mechanisms of agreements, contract, objective impartiality, and due process. Considers moral and legal points of view. |
| Stage 6: Universal Ethical Principles | Following self-chosen ethical principles. Particular laws or social agreements usually valid because they rest on such principles. Principles are universal principles of justice: equality of human rights and respect for the dignity of human beings as individuals. | The belief as a rational person in the validity of universal moral principles and a sense of personal commitment to them. | Perspective is that of a rational individual recognizing the nature of morality or the fact the persons are ends in themselves and must be treated as such. |

Source: Lawrence Kohlberg, "Moral Stages and Moralization: The Cognitive-Developmental Approach," in *Moral Development and Behavior: Theory, Research and Social Issues*, ed. Thomas Lickona (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), pp. 34-35

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Wilson (1990) defends the practice of the direct teaching of moral thinking to our students. This means directly and openly telling pupils what it means for a person to be morally educated, and inviting them to make use of the components to settle moral questions The teacher would show the pupil "how to do" morality; how to make up his mind on moral questions and what bits of equipment he needs for moral thought and action. He feels that this approach is honest, professional and gives students something to hang on to.

So how do schools best help shape the character of the young? Effective schools share the same characteristics as highly effective parents. Well grounded teachers and schools set high expectations and nourish children's earned sense of competence and self-reliance. They rely on extrinsic control, clarity, consistency, nurture, and honesty of communication to shape their students' character. They are primarily concerned for the well-being of the children. Schools with these characteristics are more likely to graduate students who are accomplished academically and who demonstrate the habits and character traits that lead to productive citizenship. (Benninga & Wynne, 1998).

Schools who choose to adopt character education programs should assess them. Ryan (1995) points out seven concerns in assessing character education programs. They are:

1. Not defining what character education truly is.
2. Confusing character education with the "stage bumping" of cognitive moral education.
3. Evaluating programs before their time.
4. Using teacher and student self-reports exclusively as a basis for assessment.
5. Focusing on the words and ignoring the behavior.
6. Have a one-size-fits-all assessment program or instrument for the entire school or district.
7. Not trying at all.

## Present Practice of Local Christian Schools

"Character is that which reveals moral purpose, exposing the class of things a man chooses and avoids." Aristotle

My interest in this line of thinking comes from brief glimpses into private Christian schools in the greater Seattle area. Extensive study and research needs to be done, possibly with a survey to truly evaluate if character education permeates the Christian school environment.

The little I know about our schools is that character education is more assumed than intentional, hidden within the Bible curriculum and appears to be more random than planned.

## Implications for the Future

One schools plan for Bible Based, developmental Character Education program.

Is it important that Christian schools plan for the development of character in their students? I believe it is more important than the academic requirements. Many Christian schools are K- 12 and often on one campus. The curriculum which can be used often just targets one developmental level, such as elementary, or junior high. There is a need for a comprehensive spiritual plan in Christian schools today which is school-wide, intentional, developmental and reasonable to implement.

A spiritual plan of this sort would tie all spiritual matters of a school together. Mission opportunities, service projects, Bible curriculum, and chapel would work together for the intentional development of a Christian young person, so at graduation

one can see the culmination of twelve years of true education. Character development can be part of this spiritual plan, for the Bible is clear that we are to seek to be like Christ.

Why developmental? To reflect on ones values, one must first be able to reflect. Further research in the area of developmental moral reasoning, using Piaget, Kohlberg and Fowler, is necessary to bring character education into the Christian school in a manner to make the biggest impact on students lives.

Since we are in the initial stages of the spiritual plan, only the basic framework has been put into place. Monthly character traits are written for a four year rotating cycle. (Appendix 2) A student in kindergarten would go through the cycle three times, each time at a different developmental level. The goal would be to add and assimilate characteristics less as a habit and more of a lifestyle each time through.

Chapel services reflect the trait of the month with speakers talking about that topic. Students are recognized monthly for exhibiting that particular trait. Spiritual emphasis week will be molded around that particular trait. Service projects are tied into the plan.

Character development takes time and we may not see the fruit of our labor for many years. Alfie Kohn (1997) has been very critical of this style of teaching character development. He has concluded that character education is, for the most part, a collection of exhortations and extrinsic inducements designed to make children work harder and do what they are told. Even when other values are promoted, the preferred method of instruction is tantamount to indoctrination. The point is to drill students in specific behaviors rather than to engage them in deep, critical reflection about certain ways of being.

He goes on to state that the problems with character education are not restricted to strategies. More troubling are the fundamental assumptions that children are basically evil, that most behavior problems are "the result of sheer willfulness on the part of children." He believes that character education rests on three ideological legs; behaviorism. conservatism, and religion.

Although I do not agree with all his assessments, I do think that careful study and development of a spiritual plan should be able to answer some of the questions related to indoctrination, behaviorism, conservatism, and religion. The Christian worldview does teach that we all were born evil, and we do spend the rest of our lives seeking to be more Christlike in character.

This paper is not based on empirical data and much more research needs to be done in the area of consistent character education within the Christian school setting. Parent education needs to be thoroughly explored. In Christian schools parents sacrifice in tuition dollars but then place the burden of responsibility of teaching morality to their children in the hands of the Christian school teacher and administrators. Partnership with church and home needs to be researched in the Christian school culture.

The advantage to a program of character development in the Christian school is that the Bible is agreed upon as the foundation for its program. Then staff. parents, local pastors and administrators can reflect together on what character traits our graduates would exhibit. Consistent adult modeling of parents. pastors, teachers and all adults in a school environment would be the "living" curriculum.

Evaluation of such a program would need to be developed to assist in the effort to achieve the goals. (Appendix 3)

Lastly, the final product needs to always drive decisions. The education of a child will determine his worldview. Glen Shultz, (1998) states,

> First, we must remember that all education strives to achieve some type of result or outcome for young people. Second, we need to recognize the fact that education cannot guarantee certain academic, physical, or fine arts achievements. It cannot even guarantee the development of a moral individual or society. We must face the reality that every person will leave his education and enter adulthood with a world view. This world view will be either man-centered or God-centered.

"The true test of civilization is not the census, nor the size of the cities, or the crops – no, but the kind of man the country turns out." Ralph Waldo Emerson

Appendix 1

## 10 REASONS SCHOOLS SHOULD OFFER CHARACTER EDUCATION

*Adapted from "Educating for Character" How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility," by Thomas Lickona*

1. There is a clear and urgent **need**.
2. Transmitting values has always been the work of civilization.
3. The schools role as moral educator becomes even more vital at a time when millions of children get little moral teaching from parents, churches or temples.
4. There is **common ethical ground** even in our value-conflicted society.
5. Democracies have a special need for moral education because democracy is government by the people themselves.
6. There is no such thing as value-free education.
7. The great questions facing both the individual and the human race are moral questions.
8. There is a broad-based, growing **support** for values education.
9. An unabashed commitment to moral education is essential if we are to attract and **keep good teachers**.
10. Character education **can** be done.

Appendix 2

Heritage Christian School Character Development Traits
Four Year Plan

| MONTH | 1999-2000 | 2000-2001 | 2002-2003 | 2004-2005 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| September | ***Respect*** | ***Initiative*** | ***Self Control*** | ***Obedience*** |
| October | ***Prayer*** | ***Wisdom*** | ***Attentiveness*** | ***Honest*** |
| November | ***Thankfulness*** | ***Determination*** | ***Gratefulness*** | ***Courage*** |
| December | ***Joyfulness*** | ***Reverence*** | ***Compassion*** | ***Encouragement*** |
| January | ***Discernment*** | ***Contentment*** | ***Orderliness*** | ***Leadership*** |
| February | ***Love*** | ***Loyalty*** | ***Purity*** | ***Kindness*** |
| March | ***Service*** | ***Neatness*** | ***Diligence*** | ***Responsibility*** |
| April | ***Forgiveness*** | ***Humility*** | ***Faith*** | ***Controlled Speech*** |
| May | ***Integrity*** | ***Patience*** | ***Dependability*** | ***Fairness*** |
| June | ***Commitment*** | ***Maturity*** | ***Confidence*** | ***Sincerity*** |

Appendix 3

## ELEVEN PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE CHARACTER EDUCATION

*Standards by which to plan and assess a character education program.*

Thomas Lickona

1. Character education promotes **core ethical values** as the basis of good character.
2. Character must be **comprehensively defined** to include thinking, feeling and behavior.
3. Effective character education requires an intentional, proactive, and comprehensive approach that promotes the core values in all phases of school life.
4. The school must be a **caring** community.
5. To develop character, students need opportunities for **moral action**.
6. Effective character education includes a **meaningful and challenging academic curriculum** that respects all learners and helps them succeed.
7. Character education should strive to develop students' **intrinsic** motivation.
8. The school staff must become a learning and moral community in which **all share responsibility** for character education and attempt to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students.

10. The school must recruit parent and community members as full **partners** in the character-building effort.
11. Evaluation of character education should **assess the character of the school**, how the school staff members function as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character.

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